

ST. AGNES,
Virgin and Martyr.

BY

MOST REV. CORNELIUS O'BRIEN, ✓

ARCHBISHOP OF HALIFAX.

"Nil non pudicum est, quod pia Visere
Dignaris, almo vel pede tangere."

PRUDENTIUS HYM.

Nothing is impure upon which thou dost lovingly deign to look,
or to touch with thy holy foot.

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PREFACE.

N the preparation of this short account of St. Agnes, Virgin, Martyr, authentic narratives have been carefully consulted. Nothing has been taken second-hand. The glorious example of the lovely maiden who generously gave up all the goods of this world, and her own life as well, rather than offend her God, should excite noble aspirations in every rightly constituted heart.

To young girls she is a model for imitation ; to all who believe in God and in virtue she is a noble ideal ; to devout clients she will be a tender helper on the rough road of life.

That she may be widely known, loved and imitated, is the object of this work.

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St. Agnes—Virgin, Martyr.

CHAPTER I.

IDEALS.

We may judge of a nation by the character of its heroes; and we may take the measure of a man by his ideals. A warlike people will honor those whose achievements on the field of battle have been daring and brilliant; an intellectual one, on the other hand, will seek to place in niches, in its national temple of fame, those who in science, art or literature explored new regions, or invented more suitable methods of cultivating the old ones. The actions of an individual are correlative to his ideals. Principles that guide conduct usually take concrete form in some personage either personally known, or of whom we read. Our imagination is impressed with his person-

ality ; our heart is won by some special characteristic of his nature ; and he seems an embodiment of all that is brightest and best in human nature. We have thus our ideal. Now, ideas assume, sooner or later, the form of action ; but this action can never be greater, or more noble, than the ideal model after which it is fashioned. Could we succeed in giving lofty ideals to mankind, vice and crime would cease ; mercy and truth would abound ; justice and peace would meet and kiss.

Our Divine Saviour gave us Himself and His Heavenly Father as models. "Be perfect as your Heavenly Father is perfect," and "Learn of Me because I am meek and humble in heart," clearly point out to us our rule of conduct, or real model in shaping our actions. Striving to imitate this eternal ideal, men renounced all worldly goods, all the allurements of life, all the comforts of home, all the benefits of society, and gave themselves up to prayer, mortification, and unceasing labour to subdue themselves, and to attain, in

as much as it is possible, the perfection of God. Who but God can tell the unnumbered blessings brought down on humanity through their tears and prayers? Who but He can tell the benefit of their example? One drop of water set in motion communicates that motion to innumerable particles in the lake; and the example of one noble fellow-being stirs up and animates to emulation many others; those in their turn react on others; the action and reaction will go on till the end of time. Hence even those who may, in their foolishness of heart, and in their intellect warped by prejudice, and blinded by material comforts, laugh at the ascetics of the desert, or the monks of LaTrappe, are influenced in some measure by their example.

But human nature is weak and prone to discouragement in spiritual things. The infinite distance between us and our Creator casts us down; the difficulty of realizing God as a personal being is a great barrier to our imitation of Him; and consciousness of our imperfections dims our hopes of success. Only

mind of the loftiest mould have the courage and perseverance requisite to aspire after the highest model, God. The loving care, however, of Holy Church has not left us to despondency. If our God is too far removed from our weak nature, His sainted ones, flesh and blood like ourselves, may surely invite our imitation. Like us, they were subject to the trials of life, its temptations and miseries. Passion was not dead within them; it fought fiercely for the mastery; the "body of this death" under which St. Paul fretted, weighed heavily on them. But they did not lose courage; they did not remain idle; they did not expect to conquer without fighting. They girded on the "armour of faith;" they put on the "helmet of truth;" they grasped the sword of grace and went boldly forth to the battle. One by one they cut down the enemies that opposed them—these were the same three who surround us, the devil, the world and the flesh. In some cases the battle was short, and the Saints were victors without a scar. Often, however, the fight was for years,

or even for a whole lifetime, and the Saint, though victorious in the end, was frequently wounded and bruised. But he never threw down his arms; he never despaired; he never made a truce with the enemy. This was the secret of his success; in this he differed most from us.

Now our Holy Church, the fruitful Mother of Saints, in order to encourage her weaker children, is accustomed to remind them of their heroic brothers in heaven. Hence from the earliest days of Christianity the anniversary of a martyr's death was solemnly celebrated, their example held up for imitation, and their praises propagated throughout the Church. Eusebius,* speaking of the burial places of the Saints, says: "We are accustomed to honour their sepulchres, to pour forth our prayers and vows, and to venerate their holy souls; and justly is this done by us." And nearly a century before that St. Cyprian had said: "We offer sacrifices as often as we

* (De Prep. Evang. l. xiii.)

celebrate the passion of the martyrs, and their annual commemoration."

We know from authentic history that many, even pagans, were led to proclaim their readiness to die for the true God, from being witnesses of the constancy, under sufferings, of the martyrs. Whilst the recital of their glorious deeds may not affect one as sensibly as would the sight thereof, still a consideration of their fortitude and burning love for God must always move a generous heart to higher and nobler purposes. This, of itself, would be a sufficient vindication of the practice of the Church in honouring the memory of the saints, and in proposing them as models for our imitation. Nations have their heroes; families have their honoured members; so, too, the Catholic Church has her valiant sons and daughters, whom she delights to point out to friends and foes. They are her glory and her pride; they are her testimony before men; they are visible proofs of her possession of sanctifying grace; they are at once an example and a hope to mankind. For if they,

frail mortals, could be so endued by heavenly strength through her, we, too, may aspire to a glorious victory over ignoble passions, and seductive pleasures. We can have the arms with which they fought—for faith and truth are indefectible in the Church; we can be strengthened as they were—for God's grace flows as freely through the Sacraments now as then. What we require is the will, the strong, generous, unwavering will to love our God with our first and best love. If we have this will the Church offers us, through her faith and means of grace, the weapons that will make us victors in the fight.

There are any number of saints who might be taken as models. One, however, there is, the spoilt darling, so to speak, of Holy Church's children, whose gentle nature, in tender years, gave proof of firmest constancy and heroic endurance in such a striking manner as to make her a noble ideal of Christian perfection. The name of St. Agnes, Virgin, Martyr, has been praised and honoured for more than fifteen centuries. Her glory filled

the early Church, and has come down undiminished to our day. After our Blessed Lady no nobler type of womanhood could be proposed to the women of to-day. We shall endeavour to give a brief account of the life and happy death of her whom we commend to all as a model, an ideal, and a patroness.

CHAPTER II.

ST. AGNES.

The Book of Wisdom tells us that life is not to be counted by years, nor venerable old age by length of time. But the inspired writer is not speaking after the fashion of the world; he is looking at man in his relation to God, and considering in what measure he has approached to His Maker by the practice of virtue. For he adds: "The understanding of man is grey hairs; and a spotless life is old age."* Even in a worldly sense length of years is not synonymous with amount of life. The more we think the more we live. Intellectual activity is the true measure of a natural life; and intensity of love for God that of a religious one. It is not years so much as work that count in any service; not time but the manner of spending it. Hence

* Wis. iv. 8, 9

it is that the same inspired writer says, speaking of the just who die young: "Being made perfect in a short space, he fulfilled a long time." In treating of an intelligent being then, we are not to ask how many years did he live, but how much did he do?

Counted by years the life of St. Agnes was short; measured by a supernatural standard it reached a venerable old age. She had the "grey hairs" of understanding, in that she placed God before all this world could offer, and reputed as detriment what many hold as lucre. She had the old age of a "spotless life," for she was the chaste spouse of Christ. Her pure soul knew no love but that of Him of whom she could say: "When I love Him I am chaste; when I touch Him I am pure; when I receive Him I am a virgin." She did not live for herself but for Christ; her language was that of one inflamed with love for Jesus, for whom she lived, to whom she committed herself, with whom she kept faith.

She thus "fulfilled a long time," because she was made "perfect in a short space." It is

not unfitting, then, that she should have excited the admiration of all; that the glory of her beautiful life and triumphant death should have filled the early Church, and her shrine have become a rest-spot for hearts that yearn to burst the shackles of the flesh, and to rise into the pure atmosphere of chaste love. The glorious child-saint, with all the perfections of womanhood, was faithful to God under trial, was generous in suffering, was chaste amid the allurements of her pagan surroundings, and was constant unto death. In these is she found worthy of praise; in these she is a hope and a model for us.

We have no certain dates regarding her birth or death; still enough may be gathered to enable us to fix her martyrdom about the year 304. As she was only young when she suffered, her birth must have been somewhere near the year 290. In order to understand some passages relating to her, which seem inconsistent with her youth, we must bear in mind that, under the Roman law, the marriageable age for girls was the twelfth year.

Hence a Roman girl of fourteen was, in all respects of womanly nature, on a plane with those of seventeen or eighteen in our colder climate, and changed surroundings. This must be borne in mind, both for the intelligent appreciation of her history, and for the due glory of her victory.

The authorities on whom we shall rely in weaving this short sketch of our Saint, are venerable for sanctity and learning. St. Ambrose of Milan, St. Augustine, Pope Damasus, Prudentius, St. Jerome, and some others who lived within less than fifty years of her death. We have also the domestic history and tradition of the Roman Church. A few years after her death Constantine gave peace to Christendom, and a church was erected over her tomb. From that day to the present the Romans have celebrated her Feast as a family event. They lovingly treasured all that related to her. Even in our day, three years ago, there was brought to light evidence of the love of the early Church for her tomb, and a proof of the correctness of

domestic tradition regarding it. This consisted in the upturning of a portion of a beautiful marble rood screen, with a figure of the Saint in sculptured relief. It evidently dated from the fourth century.

The parents of Agnes were wealthy Roman nobles, and were Christians. Thus from her earliest years she was taught to know and love her God. Although in this she was as much privileged as the Catholic girls of to-day, in many other respects she was at a great disadvantage. The public life of Rome was, in her time, pagan. It was a sceptical paganism that was rife; it had none of the natural virtues inculcated by the religious observances of the early days of Rome. The implicit belief in and reverence for a Supreme Cause, and the real devotion to that cause, which were so characteristic of Romans in the first centuries of their national history, had died out. Little by little the original faith in one God whom Numa learnt to reverence, probably from the Jews, and whom he taught his people to adore, had been overlaid with error,

and poetic fables. As the Romans extended their conquests they brought back to their city not only the spoils of the vanquished, but also whatever of religion and learning they may have had. Thus, by degrees, idolatry, in all its revolting forms, was introduced. With its establishment as the religion of Rome began the decadence of the people. The religious system inaugurated by Numa, the good old king, recognized the one true God, the immortality of the soul, freedom of will, and future rewards and punishments. Its effects were beneficial; it gave a hope to man, it stimulated virtue, and it was a check to vice. But the idolatry that succeeded engendered a scepticism like to that so prevalent in our age; and, like to it, too, took away all incentive to self-restraint, extinguished hope, made faith a mockery, killed charity, and had no ideal to encourage and to incite to noble action. Degradation and vice succeeded as a natural consequence. Even with the leaven of Christianity at work to-day, we see how degraded, sensual, how thoroughly *animal*,

men become when they give up belief in God, immortality, or liberty of the will. How much more direful must have been the consequences of unbelief before the Act of Redemption had renewed the earth.

Public life, then, in the days of Agnes, was corrupt and degraded. The atmosphere was polluted by the ribald jests and vile conversations of the pagan masses. The sanctity of home was almost forgotten; the marriage bond disregarded. Turn where you would the eye encountered some object to disgust or shock Christian, aye, natural modesty. The manly sports of former days had been succeeded by demoralizing plays and cruel games, at which human blood alone could satisfy the brutalized spectators. Society was a festering mass; no ordinary remedies could cure it. Blood, the blood of the innocent and noble of heart, shed in testimony to the blood of Christ, could alone, under God, cleanse and purge away its loathsome impurities. And this remedy the vice of the times was, unconsciously, hastening. The hatred, of our religion which

exists now, existed then with greater intensity. Our forefathers in the faith had, for the most part, to worship God in secrecy. They could not trust their intimate pagan friends in many instances; for sometimes a son betrayed his father, or a brother his brother. This hatred of the Christian name, whilst it rendered difficult the practice of religion, was continually bringing innocent victims to the slaughter, whose blood was slowly, but surely, purifying the city, and pleading for its conversion.

From this it can be seen that our gentle Agnes labored under greater disadvantages than the Catholic girls of this city. She was like a lovely lily growing in marshy ground. Stagnant pools of putrid water surround the frail flower, emitting a poisonous vapor that threatens to blight and sear it. But the delicate plant hedges itself round with the odour of its own sweetness, and thus protects itself against the noxious gases that would otherwise destroy its growth. Not otherwise did St. Agnes; the corrupt atmosphere of the degraded

city did not infect her soul, or tarnish the beautiful bloom of her virgin heart; for she surrounded herself with the magnetism of her own purity, thus subduing and confounding the unholy, and ever looking through that medium of magnetic purity to Christ, her heavenly spouse. Him only she loved; and Him only, not the dangerous objects around, she contemplated. She was of those of whom it is said: "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."

CHAPTER III.

ST. AGNES—VIRGIN.

The great and learned St. Jerome, writing to Demetrius, says: "If the example of men do not move you, be strengthened and confirmed by the blessed martyr Agnes, who conquered both the timidity of youth and the tyrant; and consecrated her title of virginity by martyrdom."* This was written within a century after the death of our Saint, and by one who had spent years at Rome, and who was the most renowned scholar in an age when learned men were plentiful, both in the East and the West. We shall see later on how this testimony is confirmed by various authorities. The young life of the lovely girl, though short in years, and hidden by her innate modesty from the public, had not been allowed to be forgotten. God delights to exalt

* (Epist. ad Demetriadem, No. 5.)

the humble, and to show his eternal power in the weak.

Noble and pure lives are lights kindled by divine grace in Holy Church. They are not to be stowed away under a bushel; they are placed on a candlestick so that their light may be seen of men. They are beacons of hope to the weary and discouraged; they show the true path to those who seek in sincerity of heart; they proclaim the strength, the joy, the peace that divine grace bestows on all who live for God in our Church, holding its Faith, and devoutly receiving its Sacraments.

Hence, though taken away from this earthly scene, St. Agnes lived on, in her virtues, in the souls of the faithful, and as an ideal of womanly purity and a model to be imitated in her gentle firmness and unswerving love. She was true to her name—for Agnes in Greek means chaste, in Latin a lamb, the symbol of innocence and piety. She proved her right to the title of Virgin, for she consecrated it by her martyrdom. And St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, writing to his sister

on virginity, brings forward Agnes as a true model. He, like us, celebrated her Feast with rejoicing, calling it her natal day, for on that day her true birth, viz.: her birth for heaven, took place. He says: "It is the natal day of a Virgin; let us strive to imitate her chastity. It is the natal day of a martyr; let us offer sacrifice. It is the natal day of St. Agnes; let men admire and let not the youthful despair; let married women wonder, and let the unmarried imitate her. But what can we say that shall be worthy of her? Piety beyond her years; virtue above nature; so that she seems to me not to have borne so much the name of a human being as the foreshadowing of a martyr, indicating what she would be."* This is the testimony of one who lived shortly after her death; who, doubtless, conversed with some who knew her, and who knelt by her tomb where her name and her actions were repeated. From it we can form some idea of her beautiful life, and of the impression it left on those with

* (De Virginibus, Lib. I., C. II.)

whom she had come in contact. All ascribe to her a double crown—that of chastity and of martyrdom.

When we speak of her as a virgin we do not merely mean that she was unmarried; we mean that she consecrated herself, body and soul, to God her Saviour. Not only had earthly love never engaged her mind, nor ruffled the calm depths of her tranquil spirit, but she was resolved that it never should. Her soul was a sanctuary sacred to God alone; only He might enter therein. Her heart was a temple dedicated to His service; in it worship to Him alone could be offered. Her whole being was an altar on which only the pure offerings of chaste love to her Divine Saviour could be laid; only to Him should the affections send up the incense of holy aspirations. She was a bride betrothed to Jesus; His abundant graces, and her pure love, were the mutual pledges of this mystical and holy union. She aspired to be one of that chosen band who shall be near the Lamb, and follow Him "whithersoever He goeth,"

and shall sing a "new canticle" that no one else in heaven can intone. But to attain to that she should be a virgin; she should be undefiled; she should be "without spot before the throne of God."*

There are those who decry a life of celibacy, and call it unnatural, or pretend that it is impossible. Well, these do not "know the gift of God." It is not unnatural, it is rather above nature; it is impossible, certainly, without divine grace; with it there is no difficulty, except that of jealously guarding within ourself that grace of continence which God bestows on those whom He calls to lead, on earth, the life of an angel. Without doubt pure human love is good; matrimony is a holy state, and the one intended for the vast majority of mankind. This the Church teaches and defends. She is the upholder and uncompromising defender of the sanctity of the marriage tie; at the same time she extols, as did Christ and St. Paul, the state of virginity as higher and holier. A life of celibacy is

* (Apocalypse xiv.)

certainly not commanded, but it is counselled as being more perfect. To any one who will read the seventh chapter of the first Epistle to the Corinthians this will be quite apparent. After giving various reasons in favor of celibacy, to those who have the gift, whilst leaving freedom to marry if persons so will, the Apostle sums up: "Therefore both he that giveth his virgin in marriage doeth well: and he that giveth her not doeth better."* Thus, then, in choosing a life of virginity St. Agnes had the open counsels of St. Paul and the authority of our Divine Saviour Himself† on her side.

It is a mistake quite common among the unthinking that human sympathy is frozen to death in the breast of a true virgin. To those who know anything of the religious life this mistake appears most grotesque. Human love is restricted; it may even be said to be selfish, that is, confined to the immediate objects beloved. The love of a mother for her chil-

* (1 Cor. vii. 38.)

† (Matt. xix. 12.)

dren is beautiful and unselfish in the sense that she would cheerfully wear out her life for them ; but viewed in its relation to mankind it is selfish, because concentrated on her own and not extended to them. On the other hand the true priest, the true religious has world-wide sympathies. Divine love has replaced, or rather elevated and ennobled, human affection in his heart. He sees a soul to be saved under the garb of the beggar, as well as beneath the costly apparel of the wealthy ; the halt and the blind are as much his brothers as the strong and vigorous : loathsome diseases cannot make him stand aloof from the sufferer, in whom he recognizes one redeemed by the blood of the Saviour. The bonds of earthly ties, always narrow and restricted, have been broken ; freed from them the virgin soul is linked by the golden chain of divine charity to the sorrowful, as well as to those who rejoice. With these it joins in smiles of congratulation ; with those it mingles words of comfort with its tears. Take away celibacy and you deprive the world of

its fairest flowers, you rob mankind of its most tender comforter, and you leave a terrible blank on the page of lofty heroism. But whilst the gospel message continues to be preached there will always be noble souls enamoured of the Virgin Lamb, panting and aspiring to offer themselves as virgin victims on the altar of His eternal love.

Our gentle Agnes was one of that chosen band. The unspeakable impiety of pagan Rome moved her to sorrow, and made her long to sacrifice herself for the salvation of her fellow-citizens. Innocence, holy purity of soul and body, was required to stem the tide of depravity that rolled onward through degenerating generations. Hence she vowed herself the chaste spouse of her Lord; blood, the blood of an unpolluted body, was needed to cleanse the moral rottenness of society; this she was willing, even anxious to give. Beauty of person, wealth, rank, youth, health, all were hers. All that makes life most alluring, and secures for its possessor the homage and ready service of society, had been

bestowed upon her with a lavish hand. God gave her much so that her renunciation of the world might be more meritorious, and thus ensure for His beloved spouse a higher degree of glory.

Her childhood was passed in the safe precincts of a Christian home. Out on the Nomentana Way her parents had a villa, distant nearly two miles from Rome. In these grounds, probably within the enclosure of the house, there was a descent to the Catacombs beneath. These, as can now be seen, were of a very early date, long prior to the days of our Saint. As a child, the fair Agnes was accustomed to frequent these silent homes of the dead. Possibly, in one of the chapels of this holy ground, she first received her God in the Blessed Eucharist. As she advanced in years, she was obliged, in order to divert suspicion, to show herself in public occasionally. Her beauty and wealth, to say nothing of her sweet amiability, won her many admirers. Their sincere praises, equally with their idle flatteries, were unable to affect her calm self-

unconsciousness, or to trouble the clear depths of her holy affections. She was in the world, but not of it. She walked the streets of Rome, but her soul was ever contemplating the heavenly Jerusalem. Hideous public vice stalked through the squares, and flaunted under the porticos of baths, and theatres; but the modest eyes of the virgin Agnes looked not on it; they were gazing far away through the light of her own purity, to the eternal face of her beloved Redeemer. Revolting songs and speeches filled the air of the city; but her ears were closed to them: she only heard the words of her chosen spouse—"My beloved to me, and I to my beloved." Gems and costly ornaments were offered her; but she said she was betrothed to One to whom she kept faith. He had enriched her with pearls and precious stones; He had set a mark upon her, and she could admit no other lover. Sweet of disposition, gentle in manner, tender of speech, modest in every movement, she lived the life of an angel, in a city of sin and corruption.

CHAPTER IV.

ST. AGNES—MARTYR.

St. Ambrose says that "no one is more praiseworthy than the one who can be praised by all;" and that the one word, 'martyr', is a sufficient eulogy. And he adds that there will be as many glorifiers as there are persons who, in speaking, proclaim one a martyr.* It is of our dear Agnes he is writing when he makes use of this language. We saw that she resolved to live a virgin; we shall see that she was ready to die a martyr. Our Blessed Lord told His disciples that they should bear witness to Him in Jerusalem and Judæa, and throughout the world. This they were to do by preaching to men His law, and by testifying to the wonderful miracles by which He had confirmed His divine mission. They were also to bear witness to Him by cheerfully

* (De Virgin, Lib. I., C. 2, N. 6.)

suffering death for the truths He had taught. This would be the grand test of their sincerity, and a proof beyond contradiction of their love. "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friend,"* are the words of eternal wisdom. How great, then, must be the reward, how dazzling the glory of one who lays down one's life for God. This is what the martyrs did. Christ shed his blood for our redemption; and many of the faithful in return shed theirs to bear witness to Him. Very shortly after the Ascension of our Saviour the glorious St. Stephen enriched the infant Church with his blood. Stripes and blows, and persecutions of various kinds were the lot of the early believers. A vicious world hated their doctrine, and raged against themselves. The pure morality of the gospel was a rebuke to the licentiousness of the age, hence the unholy sought to destroy it by torturing and slaying its professors. In vain. The blood of martyrs

* (John xv. 13.)

was the fruitful seed that brought forth innumerable souls to God. You cannot kill a true principle. Men die, but principles live on. The word of God once sent forth by our Lord could not be stayed by the efforts of man, nor be rendered unfruitful by the malice of demons. It was confirmed in the soul of the child by the blood of the martyred parent, and was propagated by the testimony thus publicly given.

We need not pause to consider the various persecutions that raged against the Church. For three centuries the record of our holy religion is made up of short intervals of peace, violent persecutions, dying slowly away, the glorious triumphs of many, occasionally marred by the lapses of a few. Before the days of St. Agnes three general persecutions had swept over the Roman Empire. Many thousands had fallen, noble victims to their devotion. During the first years of the reign of Diocletian there was no general persecution. He appears to have been averse to it, and to have been gradually spurred on by some of

III.

his colleagues in the Empire. It is true that the acts of some Saints place their martyrdom in the earlier years of his reign. But we must bear in mind that these sporadic outbursts of fury may have been the work of some over-zealous, or envious officials, in virtue of an unrepealed, though dead law, of a former Emperor. That this must have been the case, we have proof in the History of Eusebius. According to him, and he was a contemporary author, in the first years of the reign of Diocletian, the devil, who had received power to persecute the Saints, appeared to be asleep,—the name of the Christian Religion was esteemed,—new Churches had to be built, and old ones enlarged, the Prelates were honoured by the Governors of Provinces, and the wives and children of high officials were instructed in the Christian Religion.*

But this bright picture, whilst true of the eastern part of the Empire, does not correctly represent the state of the western world at

* Hist. Lib. 8 and 9.

that date. It seems quite certain that many, both in Gaul and in Rome, suffered for the faith about, or shortly before, the time St. Agnes was born. During the years of her young life, the rumbling of the coming storm was heard. Isolated martyrdoms were taking place in various parts of the Empire. The passions of the pagan mob were being aroused; the thirst for blood was increasing; the old blind hatred of Christianity was bursting forth, and gathering strength. Many Christians were wealthy, and greed of acquiring a share of their riches prompted some to denounce them; whilst private spite, or desire of revenge, urged on others. Hence the Christians well knew the deceptive nature of any apparent calm. They lived in the continual presence of danger, none the less real because impalpable. At any moment they might be called upon to choose between apostasy and torments. It was not so much death they feared, as the inhuman tortures, ingeniously devised, and prolonged not to death, but only to bodily prostration, in the hope

that courage and constancy might fail. It was not death the virgins of Christ dreaded ; it was the exposure to the danger of contamination to which they were frequently subjected, in the fiendish hope of defiling their consecrated virginity. Well the pagans knew, as our modern pagans know, that Catholic maidens value chastity more than life.

It was then in the midst of a corrupt city, in this atmosphere of dread, and with a possibility, nay even a probability, of subjection to trials worse than death, that St. Agnes passed her few years of earthly existence. Was she happy ? Who can doubt it, for all her thoughts and aspirations were of heaven ; all the longings of her young and loving heart were to be with her spouse in glory. For her death would be a welcome friend who would lead her into the presence of her Beloved. No transitory good could move her from her holy purpose ; no dangers daunt her soul, in which the firm resolution, the unwavering courage of the lion, were veiled and made amiable by the gentleness of the lamb. And

yet, in her sweet humility, fear was not unknown; not the fear of torture or death, not the fear of sufferings and calumny, but the holy fear lest she might, by any frailty, render herself unworthy of the martyr's palm, or dim one slight leaf in the virgin's lily crown. Hence her fervour in prayer, her assiduity in fulfilling her duties, her frequency of receiving the Sacraments, her careful vigilance in guarding against occasions of, or temptations to sin. The public games of Rome were probably not so dangerous to young girls as the rinks and ball rooms of to-day. They were not exposed to the unhealthy excitement now so common; and the Roman amusements took place in the broad light of day. Still St. Agnes guarded herself against these, and sought for pleasure and recreation in less dangerous places. She was gay and cheerful at all times. This is the blessed privilege of the pure of heart. A soul unclouded by sin always gleams through a face bathed in sunshine. The chronic, artificial smile of the "society" girl, compared with this, is as the

phosphorescent glow of decaying wood to the beams of a summer sun. One is all warmth and brightness, glad in itself and diffusing gladness on all objects around; the other is cold and evanescent, born of, and endeavouring to grace with mimic light, the dry rot that is defacing all its original beauty.

A sermon, attributed by many to St. Ambrose, speaking of Agnes, says, that the life and examples of holy ones are written so that each one, in any state, and of any age, may find a model. He further says: "Maidens, draw near this maid (Agnes) and learn what flames of love for Christ she kindled in her heart in her tender years. She protests that she will keep faith to her lover, and will desire only Him who gave His life for the love of all. Learn, ye virgins of Christ, the love glowing in the breast of this maiden, and rejecting as dross the riches of this world.

* * * Brought face to face with one trying to win her by flattery, she refuses; she despises his threats, awaits the kindling of the fire, and smiles. No transitory good can

claim her heart, and whilst she loves chastity so much she does not fear opprobrium, nor the flames, nor torments, nor the executioners."* Our Saint, then, desiring the glory of bearing witness to Christ by a martyr's death, strove to render herself worthy by bearing witness to Him in her daily life, by imitating His purity, His humility, and His obedience.

* (Ser. xlviii., Tom. 4 Edit., Migne.)

CHAPTER V.

THE INNER LIFE OF ST. AGNES.

Our outward life, our manner of acting in our intercourse with others, is easily known by our friends. It falls under their observation, and we cannot, even if we would, deceive them in this regard. The motives, however, that prompt our actions, the principles that underlie our conduct, may be hidden from their knowledge, and may be quite at variance with our external life. The world is full of hypocrites; some unconsciously so, others so of a set purpose, and others again because of easy-going good nature. It is only in the perfect Christian that the outward life is a true reflection of the inner. But in the perfect Christian not all the inner life is reflected in action. There are waves that never reach the shore; there are thoughts too sublime to be winged with words; emotions too exquisite for expression; lights and shades of feeling

too delicate for other canvas than that of the pure soul in which they are engendered. The copy can never equal the original; the shadow must be always fainter than the real. Beautiful, then, as the outward life of St. Agnes was, it fell far short of that inner one which was lived for and with her God. Outward piety without inner sanctity is hypocrisy; exterior cleanliness devoid of interior purity is a whited sepulchre filled with dead men's bones; ceremonial observance uninformed by the spirit of true devotion is only a hideous skeleton of religion. By contemplating the inner life of St. Agnes we may learn many salutary lessons.

How shall we attempt to unveil, for consideration, this sanctuary of the soul of our gentle Agnes? We find written over the door "sacred to God," and our hand trembles as we stretch it forth to draw aside the curtain. But if it be "good to hide the secret of a king," it is "honourable to reveal and confess the works of God."* And this soul of Agnes,

(Tobias xii. 7.)

adorned with many virtues, rich in good deeds, and beautified by grace, is a noble work of His. He is the author of its existence, and the sanctifier of its essence. From Him is the beauty of its flowers, and to Him does their perfume ascend. Gazing on its beauty, hearing the soft music of its words of rapt love, breathing its odour of sanctity, our hearts will be raised in tenderness towards the author of this work ; our weak nature will be encouraged by the sight of the perfection to which fidelity to God can lift it up, and St. Agnes will seem to stretch forth her pure hands to help us on our weary road.

The great charm in the character of our Saint was her modesty—refined, though fearless ; retiring, but courageous. She avoided dangers, but when, against her will, she had been brought face to face with them, she was not weakened by terror. Girding on the armour of faith, abandoning herself to God, her protector, she contemned the devices of her tempters. Her passionately tender love for Jesus, her chosen spouse, was at once the

cause and the promoter of this modesty; her great faith in God was, for her, its certain shield in time of trial. She was His; He would protect her in unsought dangers. This was her unshakeable trust; this the source of her lofty courage. Her own words as related in her acts beautifully express this. When threatened by the judge with worse than death if she did not sacrifice to the idols, she replied: "If thou didst know my God thou wouldst not speak thus. Hence I, because I know the power of my Lord Jesus Christ, securely despise thy threats, believing that I shall neither sacrifice to thine idols, nor be brought to shame by others; for I have with me an angel of the Lord who guards my body. For the only Son of God, whom thou knowest not, is to me as a wall that cannot be cast down; He is a sentinel who never sleeps, a defender who never grows weary."*

But in order to have this unswerving confidence she knew it was necessary to belong to

* (S. Amb. Tom. 4, p. 739, Edit. Migne.)

her spouse body and soul, in thought as well as in deed. That she did thus belong to Him we have her own words in the acts just quoted, in which she says: "God sent His angel who clothed me with this garment of mercy, and protected my body, which was consecrated and offered to Christ from the very cradle." Her charming modesty of manner was not, then, a mere outward mask; it was the beautiful soul, revealing its chaste love through the body consecrated to Christ, that shone on all, delighting the virtuous and abashing the vicious. It feared nothing except sin; its only love was God and the salvation of souls. It need not surprise us to learn that she appeared more like an angel winging its flight to heaven than a mortal destined to die. Walking through the streets she gave edification by her deportment, rejoicing and strengthening the hearts of her Christian friends, who saw in her the power and triumph of maidenly purity, and impressing the pagans with a sense of awe and reverence that made them yearn for an unknown good. To how many

was she the instrument, in God's hands, of energizing that grace of prayer, given to all, and of moving their wills to use that grace in aspirations to a God whom, as yet, they knew not. Who can tell the numbers she disposed to accept joyfully the truths of Christianity, as from the inner sanctuary of her soul, glowing with generous love, she diffused an air of heaven around, quelling the grossness of their nature, awakening the latent nobility of their being, and flashing a light into the darkness of their understanding.

Her disposition was genial and kindly ; her conversation always edifying, even when she could not converse on holy things in the presence of pagans who might betray her. She knew how to speak of the world, and on subjects of daily occurrence, without wounding charity, or forgetting the presence of her Spouse. In dress she avoided all unnecessary ornaments ; and whilst neat in everything, she rejected with horror such adornments of her person as were not in conformity with Christian modesty. We need not stop to ask how

she would act if she were living in our day. She would never forget that the laws of modesty do not change; that fashion is not synonymous with propriety; and that custom cannot excuse any form of dress which violates the instincts of maidenly delicacy. Her gentle spirit would be aroused to holy indignation, her pure womanhood would feel itself outraged by certain forms of evening costume which some women affect to consider in keeping with modesty, because in touch with fashion. We can assure our readers that many men of the world look upon some of those dresses—or rather undresses—as most unseemly.

This characteristic of maidenly modesty was with her to the end. So much did Jesus love it in her that He performed a stupendous miracle to shield it from outward profanation, as Prudentius and Pope Damasus attest. Perhaps no more beautifully expressed, or truly poetic sentiment, can be found in the whole range of literature than the last strophe of the hymn of St. Ambrose on our dear Agnes, wherein he speaks of the survival in

death of that charming modesty so conspicuous in life. He says, after telling she had been given her death wound: "In death modesty survived; covering her face with her hand, bending her knee she came to the ground, falling in a modest posture."* It was this quality of soul, this habit of mind, and outward expression in word and act, that is so praised by Prudentius, the poet, by St. Ambrose and St. Augustine, the great and holy bishops, and which has been immortalized by the Church in the Office of her Feast. It would seem to be worthy of imitation by the girls of our day.

An ardent love for God, and that generosity which is born of love, and endues with heroism in suffering for the Beloved One, was another chief trait of her character. To her it seemed nothing to suffer for one who loved her with His eternal love. The authors already referred

* In morte vivebat pudor,
Vultumque texerat manu,
Terram genuflexo petit
Lapsu verecundo cadens.

—St. Amb. Tom. 4, p. 1211, Edit. Migne.

to speak of this generous disposition, and glorify it in one so young. In the hymn quoted above St. Ambrose tells us that her parents, terrified at the persecution, sought to shelter their darling by increased bolts and bars; but her "faith, which nothing could restrain, opened the doors of her prison." As we shall see later on, she suffered with alacrity, with joy, with thanksgiving.

Fair in person, amiable in manner, gentle in action, endowed with wealth and rank, modest in heart and soul, filled with generous love for her God, bringing a breath from heaven wherever she appeared, with calm trustfulness in her chosen spouse, in whose presence she lived, young in years, but with the glorious old age of a "spotless life," and the venerable gray hairs of "understanding," this is the picture of St. Agnes, as presented by those who must have conversed with many who knew her. This was the Lady Agnes who walked the streets of Rome in the year 304, but whose heart was in the heavenly Jerusalem.

CHAPTER VI. *MARTYRDOM OF ST. AGNES.*

The authorities whom we shall quote in this chapter, are—1st. Pope Damasus, born about the time of Agnes' death. If he was not a native of Rome, he must have come thither at a very early age, not later than his fifth year. Dedicated to the service of the Church in his boyhood, he was trained in ecclesiastical knowledge, and was thoroughly familiar with the acts of the martyrs. He must have conversed with many who had known Agnes, and who had witnessed her triumphs. He adorned the catacombs with verses, cut in marble slabs, in honour of various martyrs, and amongst others, he celebrated our Saint. There can be no question of the authenticity of the verses. The slab may be seen to-day, although it was not discovered in the time of Tillemont, who appears to mistrust the evidence then produ-

eible.* There is no doubt, now. 2nd. St. Ambrose. He, also, must have spoken with those who had known our gentle Agnes. We have an undoubted work of his, "De Virginitas," from which alone we shall quote in this chapter. 3rd. Prudentius, in "Peri Stephanon," hymn 13th, in some editions, 14th. He is the Christian Poet of the early ages. A native of Spain, he spent some time at Rome, and in all probability gathered his information regarding St. Agnes from eye-witnesses. 4th. St. Augustine, who lived at the same period as the other three, and must have known, intimately, the history of Agnes. In sermon 273, C. 6, he speaks her praise. These grave and, practically, contemporary authorities are surely sufficient to put beyond the possibility of doubt, or cavil, the wonderful story of Agnes' trials, sufferings and triumph.

There is, moreover, a hymn on St. Agnes, always attributed to St. Ambrose, and no

* (Tillemont, vol. v., page 344.)

reasonable objection can be offered against its authenticity. Also, a sermon on our Saint, which the editor of Migne rejects, although he admits finding it in three manuscripts, all bearing the name of Ambrose as its author. Why he should reject it, is a puzzle to a careful reader. It is quite in keeping with his genuine work, although more extended; its style and sentiments are thoroughly Ambrosian. It is in accord with the verses of Damasus, regarding the subjection of our Saint to the test of fire. For our own part, we are convinced that it is the work of St. Ambrose. This sermon is not to be confounded with an epistle attributed to St. Ambrose, in which are very fully narrated her various trials. The epistle, although in harmony with known facts, is not from the hand of Ambrose, Bishop of Milan. It is a later compilation from ancient documents. Its rejection, however, must be sustained by other reasons than the very futile ones often advanced. These are chiefly two. The epistle speaks of Constantia, daughter of Constantine,

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having, after her cure at the shrine of Agnes, remained in virginity, and by her example many others took the veil. It is pretended first that noble ladies, at that time, did not become nuns in Rome. A single sentence from St. Jerome is the sole support of this assertion, so contrary to well-known facts. It is true, St. Jerome says, "no noble women," etc., followed the monastic life; but this is to be restricted, like his famous expression of "all the world" finding itself Arian. Both propositions are too sweeping in their generality. At the time Jerome wrote that "no noble women" at Rome were following the monastic life, Pope Damasus was writing the epitaph of his sister, Irene, in which he tells us she "had vowed herself to Christ during life, so that holy chastity might obtain for her the virgin's crown."* The other reason is that Constantia was espoused to Gallican. True; but it is not proved that they were afterwards married. We know, moreover,

(Carmen xxi, Edit. Migne,

that Constantia was buried near the tomb of Agnes, and the domestic history of the Roman Church writes her down a virgin. Still, the epistle does not belong to St. Ambrose, though doubtless some of its facts are taken from him. In the following narrative of our Saint's martyrdom, we shall refer only to the four genuine sources first mentioned.

There had been, previous to 304, a long lull in general persecutions at Rome. But now the last and most violent assault, was about to commence. Did Satan foresee that this was to be the final limit of his power against the young Church, and that soon he would be "bound for a thousand years"? Or did he vainly hope to efface the work of Christ,—to quench in blood the light of Faith,—to destroy the ark of salvation, over which the vicar of Christ presided in Rome? In his pride and malice he still dared to battle against heaven, and possibly, for nothing blinds one like pride, he may have hoped to succeed. The Christians well knew the symptoms of the approaching storm: hence they redoubled their prayers

and almsdeeds. Faithful virgins like Agnes had their lamps always trimmed; they were ever listening for the voice of the Bridegroom. Like a spirit from heaven, Agnes moved amongst the Christians, when they assembled, to assist at Mass, in the catacombs. She spoke encouragingly to the poor and lowly, and her words fell as sweetest music on their ears; she smiled serenely on her companions, and their fears vanished before the beam of calm confidence that gleamed in her tender eyes; she spoke with grave accents of respect to the old, and wavering hearts grew firm with new-born courage. Her pure voice rose above the others, in the pleading invocations of our Holy Church for grace and perseverance, and many a hardened heart softened, and many a soul seared by sin felt the refreshing dew of divine grace, and sought reconciliation in the Holy Sacrament of Penance.

Satan was filled with wrath at the sin-subduing power of Agnes; he hates most those who do most good. The edict of persecution went forth, and death or apostacy, were the

alternatives for the accused. A certain young pagan had seen and loved Agnes; he sought her hand in marriage. But she had given herself to Christ, and could not admit any other lover. St. Ambrose relates, that when urged by many to marry him, she replied, "that would be an injury to my spouse." It is not certain, from St. Ambrose, that this young man denounced her to the tribunals as a Christian, although it seems to be insinuated. In any case she was denounced. In time of a general persecution, one thus accused, was summarily dealt with. Agnes was brought before the judge, and as Prudentius tells us, she "was tried by many arts,—now by the bland words of the judge,—now by the threats of the cruel torturer. But she remained steadfast in her firm purpose, and, ready to die, willingly offered herself to be tortured." Let us endeavour to realize this scene. Here is a young girl, tenderly nurtured, of gentle manner, of refined feeling, with all the weakness of human nature, with all the natural desire of life common to the young and healthy,

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given the alternative of sufferings and death,
or to deny her God. She is human; she is at
an age when, as St. Ambrose says, "girls fear
the stern countenance of their parents."
Angry faces surround her; harsh voices
threaten her; the bloody instruments of tor-
ture seem to glare at her. She is in the power
of these heartless men; the soft voice of the
judge pleads with her to save herself. After
all, what is she asked to do? To cast a grain
of incense on the fire before the statue of
Minerva. If she will but do this, she may
walk away unharmed, live in the honour of
the Emperor, enjoy her wealth and station in
life. It seems a harmless act; and so much
depends on it. But Agnes had long learnt
that no pain is too great to bear for God;
that no earthly good is to be purchased by the
smallest sin. To her God was the joy of her
heart, the life of her soul; and to offend Him
would be the direst of evils. No; come what
would, she would never renounce her Faith.
Fearlessly she stood," says Ambrose, "in the

midst of the cruel executioners, knowing little of death, but ready to die."

We know from Pope Damasus that she was subjected to the flames; and this throws light on the passage in St. Ambrose, in which he refers to this trial. We gather from both that she was taken before the altar of the false gods, and, refusing to sacrifice, was herself placed in the flames. But that God who preserved the three Hebrew boys in the Chaldean furnace, preserved our Agnes in the midst of this fire. She stood, as St. Ambrose attests, "in the midst of the flames, and even in these sacrilegious fires formed with her outstretched arms the sign of her victorious Lord." Yes: it was a miracle; but the arm of God is not shortened. Agnes, with eyes upraised to heaven, and arms forming a cross, stood unharmed in the midst of the flames, praying to her God, whose angels were protecting her from evil. "Behold," she said, "I am suffused with the heavenly dew of the Holy Spirit; the fire dies out around me; the flame is divided, and the heat of this burning

is turned against those who are feeding it. I bless Thee, adorable Father, who dost permit me to come to Thee intrepidly, in the midst of the flames. Behold, what I have believed, I now see: what I have hoped for, I now hold; what I have desired, I now embrace." These are the words of her prayer as recorded in the epistle attributed to St. Ambrose; and we can see how appropriate they were. God would not permit the fire to sear a body so pure; moreover, He wished to show His loving care for those who trust perfectly in Him. The fires died out around the youthful virgin, but the hatred of the persecutors was unquenched. They were baffled, laughed at, overcome by a child; but malice suggested a more outrageous torture.

They saw death had no terror for Agnes: they had proved that the threat of punishment by fire had not appalled her, and that an unseen power protected her. They knew, however, that a Christian virgin valued something more than life. They would torture her through her modesty; they would bring

the blush of shame to a cheek that blanched not in the presence of rack, or burning coals. They would expose her to the scoff, and jeer, and contumely of the basest of mankind. This, Prudentius tells us, was the wicked sentence of the exasperated judge, unless she "bowed her head to the altar, and asked pardon of Minerva." Did the noble girl tremble? Did she hesitate for an instant? Did she lose confidence in her spouse, and entertain, even for a moment, the thought of escaping this new danger by renouncing her Faith? Oh, there is no cowardice in the love of Agnes. The lion's courage is behind the gentleness of the lamb, nurtured and confirmed by her trusting love for Jesus. Her reply was worthy of herself, and that is saying much. "Christ is not so unmindful of His own as to desert us, or to suffer us to lose our priceless pearl; He watches over the pure, and will not permit their chastity to be stained. You may imbrue your sword in my blood, if you will, but you shall never defile my virginity." Prudentius then describes the visible protection of the

Almighty as displayed in regard to Agnes. Her confidence was not misplaced; Christ does not desert those who really love Him: He is the strong guardian of the pure, when they have not sought the danger themselves. He can and will, when necessary, protect, even by miraculous means, the innocence that has been consecrated to Him, and never withdrawn. "Triumphantly the virgin went, singing a sacred song to God the Father and to Christ," as relates Prudentius. The worst resource failed; Agnes had received a new glory, and Satan had suffered another defeat.

One would think that seeing thus the protection accorded our Saint her persecutors would cease, and let her depart in peace. Many hearts indeed melted; many souls acknowledged the true God, and sought admittance into the fold of Christ. Her blood, however, was asked for; the cruel edict of persecution exacted apostasy or blood. Apostasy could not be wrung from Agnes; torments and ignominy had been essayed in vain, the sword must do its work. St. Am-

brose vividly describes the scene: "With a more joyful step did she go forth to the place of punishment than others to their wedding, hastening along, her head not adorned with coils of hair, but with Christ: not crowned with flowers, but with virtues. All wept; she alone was tearless. Many wondered that she, who had scarcely tasted life, should be so ready to cast it away, as if she had finished it. * * * * How the executioner strove, now to terrify, now to persuade her by soft words; how many besought her to marry. "This," she said, "would be an injury to my spouse, to look upon another as pleasing. Let Him who first chose me receive me. Why do you delay, executioner? Let this body that can be loved by eyes that please me not, perish." She stood: she prayed; she bent her neck. The executioner trembled as if he were the condemned; his right hand shook, his face blanched at the sight of another's danger, whilst the girl did not fear for her own. You have thus in one victim a double martyrdom,

of chastity and of faith. She remained a virgin, and she won the martyr's palm."

Pope Damasus says that when the sentence of death had been announced by the blare of trumpets, of her own accord she went to meet her fate. And Prudentius speaks of her joy at seeing the executioner, for she said: "This, this, I confess, is a lover who pleases me; I shall go forth to meet him. * * * Eternal Ruler, open wide the gates closed formerly to mortals; call to thee, O Christ, my longing soul, a virginal victim, and one of faith divine." With such love in her heart, with these holy aspirations on her lips, the pure soul went forth to the bosom of its God.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SHRINE OF ST. AGNES.

The beautiful life of Agnes was gloriously ended. We could not wish it to have been otherwise. She taught us how to live uncontaminated in an atmosphere of impiety; she showed us how to unite graceful manners with charming modesty; she gave an example of the lovable character that arises from a happy mingling of gentleness in action with undaunted resolution in principle; she made us realize that youth counted by years may have the venerable gray hairs of understanding, and the honoured old age of a "spotless life." Having given us these valuable lessons how to live, it was only natural that she should be called upon to teach us how to die for God. The close of her short earthly career was what all deaths are—a compendium of her life. In it we see ardent, tender love for her spouse, perfect confidence in His protecting care, and

sweet modesty triumphant to the end. She had fought bravely the good fight; she had kept the faith; she had been true to her plighted troth with our dear Lord. We can feel the beauty of the closing scene, as well as the harmony of the preceding years. Those who witnessed her death might well fancy they saw her disembodied spirit soaring aloft, as Prudentius sings, hemmed round by angels as it moves on its brilliant path; looking down on the world beneath its feet, on the lower darkness, and passing the sun's orbit in its course, until it arrives at its heavenly home, there to receive its double crown.

The martyr's death gives no cause for mourning; it is always celebrated by the Church as a birthday. The *Te Deum* is sung in action of praise. Tears are out of place at the burial of our Agnes. Her noble parents lovingly cared for her holy body, assisted by admiring friends. To them she was not dead, she only slept, whilst her spirit hovered near to bless and console them. Tenderly they bore the sacred remains to the villa of her parents,

a mile beyond the Nomentana Gate. There she was laid "in peace" in her narrow cell, near the mouth of the catacomb that has since borne her name. It became at once a sacred spot,—a shrine of grace,—a resort for the pious. In her acts we are told how the crowd, a few days after her death, were praying at her tomb, when they were set upon by the pagan mob, and her foster-sister, Emerentiana, was murdered at her feet. The first victory of a martyr is to win the grace of martyrdom for others. Agnes was dead; a great light had gone out of the lives of many; all missed her graceful form at the Mass in the catacombs, where they now regularly assembled. But she who had been a support to them in life, was now transformed into a model for their imitation. In her they saw all the best qualities of a noble Christian nature, sanctified and elevated by grace, and the practice of lofty virtues. She was an ideal fitted to win generous hearts, and to incite to emulation. As such she was not dead, and the holy bond of "Communion of Saints" united her to them.

She could pray for them, and be the pleader of their cause at the Saviour's feet. In the cruel days of persecution then upon them they could look to her example, and gain strength through her intercession. Thus her tomb became a sanctuary and a place of pilgrimage. About fifty years after her death Prudentius writes: "The tomb of Agnes, the noble girl, the illustrious martyr, is at Rome. Buried there within sight of its towers, the virgin watches over the safety of the Romans, and also protects pilgrims who supplicate with a pure and faithful heart." Pope Damasus also has put on record the sentiments of the age, as well as his own, when he wrote: "Oh illustrious virgin, venerated by me, holy beauty, and sweet image of purity, I pray thee be favourable to the prayers of Damasus." And St. Augustine* in his sermons extols her, saying: "Blessed is St. Agnes whose passion is celebrated to-day. She was what she was called, a virgin. Agnes in Latin signifies a

(Ser. 273.)

lamb; in Greek chaste. She was what she was called; hence she merited to be crowned."

A holy life is never spent in vain. There is in human nature noble instincts, even when degraded by sin. Weeds may grow thick and dank in the soul and choke, for a time, man's better nature, but a generous act of heroism seldom fails to awaken a sentiment of admiration, and a desire of emulation. Hence, though the persecutors succeeded in taking the life of our Saint, she lived as a model in the hearts of the faithful, and has been, through all ages since, the ideal maiden of song, and story, and Church history.

When peace had been restored to the Church and Constantine had broken the shackles of oppression, Christian piety soon displayed itself in its works. In the joy of general peace and security the victorious victims of persecution were not forgotten. Over the remains of Agnes a public church took the place of the underground oratory during the reign of Constantine. With a slight change of form, and somewhat enlarged, it exists now,

and is looked upon as one of the most interesting of all Rome's churches on account of the preservation of the form into which it was reduced by Pope Symmachus in 498. In order that the sacred remains of the virgin martyr should be immediately under the high altar, the earth was excavated to the depth of the coffin, thus bringing the floor of the church several feet below the level of the surrounding soil. You enter by descending a long flight of marble stairs, which lead to the atrium of the church. The nave is separated from the aisles by graceful marble columns of various qualities, and finished in different styles. Over the top of the circular arches that spring from these columns a second tier of smaller pillars arise and support the roof. The ceiling is flat, and richly finished in carved woodwork, profusely adorned with gold. The vault of the apse, or tribune, is both interesting and beautiful. It is covered with mosaic work representing St. Agnes between Popes St. Symmachus and Honorius, and is of the time of the latter pontiff, 630. It is, consequently, more

than twelve hundred years old, and speaks to us in the same mute language as our churches of to-day, and it tells of the same faith and hope, of the same form of worship, and the same devotion to the Saints. Standing in such a place one realizes, more fully than elsewhere, the unbroken line of our Church's history, its unchangeable faith, its continuity of devotional practices, the heroism of its Saints and Martyrs. One can look back through the restless years of our century, back through misty years of centuries long dead, away beyond the beginning of the crusades, beyond the civilization of England, to the first ages of the new-born Church, and find, amid all changes and dissolutions of states, the Roman Catholic Church always the same. Almost every pontiff, from Sylvester in the time of Constantine to the late Pius IX., had a tender care for the tomb of Agnes, and for the beauty of the church. Why? Because she died for the faith of which they were the guardians; she was one of the fairest children nurtured at the breast of Holy

Church, and they, its head on earth, should embalm her memory in the hearts of the faithful. Here we can look upon material proofs of the grand unity of our faith, its identity with that of the early martyrs, its indestructible power. But even as many remained blind to the witness borne by Agnes to our faith; so many, alas! educated in prejudice, deceived by false versions of history, and unwilling to face manfully the stern logic of facts, turn away their eyes from evidences such as these, and do not see, because they do not wish to see, the light.

Beneath the high altar repose the remains of the gentle Saint. A rich canopy, or baldacchino, supported by four porphyry columns, form a fitting cover for the chastely designed altar. Many lamps, set in silver sconces, burn day and night around the shrine, typical of her virtues, which outlive the grave, and shed a sweet light over the rough places of life, revealing a path whereby virginal modesty may safely walk.

The Feast of our Saint is celebrated on 21st

January, the anniversary of her precious death. It has ever been a family festival with the Romans. Old and young, the wealthy and the poor, all endeavour to visit her shrine on that glad day. It is in the heart of the short Roman winter; yet it is always bright and cheerful. There is no gloom in the air; no brooding sadness hanging over the ruins that mark the site of the ancient villa of Agnes. Death has no victory over the pure; it cannot dim the after-glow of their example, nor rob them of the admiration of the just.

During the celebration of High Mass on this day two snow-white lambs are brought up to the altar, at the offertory, and blessed by the officiating Cardinal. Then they are handed over to the care of the Nuns in a neighboring convent, who tend them until their wool is shorn. From this wool is made the *Palliums* sent by the Pope, as the badge of jurisdiction, to Archbishops.

How beautiful and how expressive are the ceremonies of Holy Church; how instructive in their symbolism. Here, on the Feast of the

gentle virgin whose name, as St. Augustine says, expressed what she really was, viz.: chaste, these lambs, the chosen symbols of purity, are blessed, and the stuff woven from their wool made into a badge of ecclesiastical jurisdiction, a reminder of the spotless purity of the Church, as well as of what the wearer should exemplify in his conduct. This ceremony proves better than words the peculiar glory of St. Agnes in the Church's touching symbolism.

The catacomb adjoining this church can be entered from the sacristy. It was a favourite burial place after the interment of Agnes. Descending into the earth you can pass along narrow passages, cut out of the soft rock, that intersect one another like streets in a city. On each side of these passages tombs have been hollowed out, tier above tier, like shelves. Here the dead were laid to rest, and the entrance blocked up with a slab of marble, or with brick. Now and then you can read a name cut in the slab, or scratched on the mortar. The trade mark, too, is sometimes

seen on a brick. But most interesting of all are the small vials occasionally seen attached to a grave; they are discolored with the blood of a martyr, and were affixed as a mark to his tomb.

Opening out of the main passage, or gallery, are large rooms hewn out of the rock, and retaining traces of ornamentation and painting. They were used as churches in time of persecution. The place for the altar and the credence table are there; the Bishop's chair and the seats at each side attest the uses for which this underground room was designed. We have paintings on the wall of Christ and some of the Apostles; the Good Shepherd; Moses striking the rock; and the Blessed Virgin with the infant Jesus.

These gloomy recesses were the homes of the most noted Christians in the days of persecution, and their burial place after death. In them they set up an altar, and the Adorable Sacrifice of the Mass was offered, shorn, doubtless, of many ceremonies, but substantially identical with our Mass to-day. Those

monuments are there to give witness in an unbelieving age that the Church of the Catacombs is identical in faith, in worship, and in obedience to the Roman Pontiff, with the free and widespread Catholic Church of to-day; and that St. Agnes, though separated from us by more than fifteen centuries, is but our dear dead sister of yesterday.

CHAPTER VIII.

FOOTPRINTS OF ST. AGNES.

The desire of fame, and the ambition of being enrolled in a nation's catalogue of heroes, have been powerful motives in inspiring men to deeds of valour and arduous enterprises. It is an honourable position indeed, and one not unworthy of a noble mind's exertion, to be written down in the records of one's country as a hero in upholding its rights, or a generous sufferer in its cause. When the principles that guide action are sound, and the conduct has been disinterested, national gratitude and national recognition are justly due the valiant defender, and, as a rule, are cheerfully accorded. Hence we find that each nation has had its illustrious men, whose memory is held in reverence. In great national emergencies they are pointed out as worthy of imitation; and their names are invoked as an incentive to courageous deeds. This confirms

what we said in the beginning of this work regarding the influence of ideals on the action of mankind, and the benefit of noble models in shaping our course in life.

Now, all who believe in Christianity recognize a spiritual as well as a natural life, or a natural and a supernatural order of actions. We are not mere animal men; we are beings with many animal passions, interests and pleasures, but with a supernatural end, to be attained through divine aid, and a right use of our faculties and powers. In the gospel dispensation this supernatural end, viz., the salvation of our souls, is put before everything else: "What shall it profit a man to gain the whole world and lose his own soul," is the keystone of the Christian arch. Men may differ, as unfortunately they do, on the nature of the means to be employed, but all agree in admitting this principle, and all agree that the supernatural life has its battles, whilst its path is beset with pitfalls and ambuscades of the enemy.

It follows from this that there is room for

heroism of a very elevated kind in the life of grace, and that the influence of ideals is no less needed and no less powerful than in the natural order. Our Holy Church has always been alive to this. She is the great kingdom of the supernatural life; her battles have been numerous, her enemies legion, her victories innumerable, and her heroes many and valiant. Lovingly she treasures up their memory, and proudly she points them out to mankind as a proof of her spiritual fecundity. By reason of her universal character her heroes are not the heroes merely of one nation or clan, they are the heroes of the whole world; their achievements are the heritage of all her children, and their praises will go down to the latest time. No glory can be so great as theirs; the praise of none others can be so universal. The Saints are the heroes of Christianity; they should be ideals and models for Christians.

Our lovely Agnes was one of these heroes of the supernatural life; she bore witness to its teachings by her death; her title cannot be

disputed. Let us trace her footprints in the history of the Church, and we shall see how great is her glory, and how powerful her hold on the hearts of men. We have already spoken of her shrine, begun at once after her martyrdom, and enlarged when peace came to the Christians. Those who desire more information on this head can consult Aringhi,* where much interesting matter may be gleaned regarding the church and its adjoining catacomb. It is our intention to show the rapid spread of devotion to our saint; to follow her footprints, not only in Rome, but throughout the whole Christian Church. The tender care of her shrine, and the uninterrupted celebration of her Feast as a family one, are sufficient indications of the permanent traces she has left in the city of her birth, and the scene of her triumphs.

Before proceeding further in this investigation, it may be well to explain just what we mean by devotion to St. Agnes, or to any

* (Roma Subterr. Tom. II., p. 152.)

Saint, and what measure of good we expect to gather therefrom. We honour the Saints as God's special friends; we ask the assistance of their prayers; but we never give them supreme honour which is due to God alone; nor do we ask them to give us grace. They cannot give it; but they may obtain it for us by their prayers and intercession before God's throne. This all Catholics know; and those who cry out against invocation of the Saints should first learn what we believe and teach on that point, and also what meaning is to be attached to the phrase "Communion of Saints," in which they profess to believe whenever they recite the Creed. St. Augustine, who believed what we hold, explains all this very fully. Amongst other things he says:—"We do not adore the martyrs as gods. * * * Sacrifices are not offered to them. The priests do not offer (sacrifice) to them; God forbid. Even when we celebrate at the places sacred to their memory (*Apud Memorias*) is it not to God we offer?"*

* (Ser. 273, cap. 7.)

Here we find that Mass was offered on the Feast of the Martyrs, and by their tombs; and that the Mass was for St. Augustine what it is for us, a real sacrifice, but offered to God alone. In chapter 7 of same discourse he adds: "Therefore, dearly beloved, rejoice on the festivals of the martyrs; pray that you may follow their footsteps. * * * *

Venerate the martyrs, praise them, love them, proclaim their deeds, honour them; adore the God of the martyrs." This is the doctrine of the Catholic Church; always the same, always consistent. God alone is to be adored; but His holy ones are to be praised, venerated, loved and invoked, as was done by St. Augustine, who, addressing Sts. Paul and Stephen in their glory, said: "*There you two see us; you both now hear my words; both of you pray for us.* * * * May they commend us in their prayers, and obtain a quiet and tranquil time for the Church of their Lord."* We thus see how devotion to the Saints was imbedded in the early Church. It

(Ser. 326, cap. 5.)

is a necessary outcome of the gospel teaching of the Communion of Saints.

Now devotion to our Agnes was widespread. Certain Saints are revered in one locality, but scarcely known elsewhere. With Agnes, however, the case was far otherwise; her name and her fame went through the whole Church. The verses formerly in the apse of her church, attributed to Constantia, seem prophetic when they speak of her as the "happy virgin of the memorable name of Agnes." We have already seen what Damasus, St. Ambrose in Milan, Prudentius of Spain, and Augustine in Africa, said of her within seventy years, or less, after her death. Her footprints are clearly visible in their writings; her example was put before their people; and devotion to her was instilled into their hearts by the recital of her noble deeds.

Even before their time, we find the great St. Martin of Tours loved and venerated our Saint, and declared that her gentle spirit frequently appeared to him in a vision, and

conversed with him.* Not only was she known and honoured in the Western Church; she was equally celebrated in the Eastern. Primitive Kalendars of the Greek Church have her festival set down for 21st January. There was also an early translation of her acts into Syriac, thus taking a knowledge of her short and beautiful life to the extreme Oriental races. Moreover, her name occurs in the Canon of the Mass, an honour confined to a very few.

Not only was her feast celebrated in the East and West, but what is unique as regards Saints, she has two Feasts on 21st January, and again on 28th. This latter is not an octave; it is a distinct feast. We find these two feasts in the Kalendars of all the Churches in the Greek, African, and Roman. This is a peculiar glory of our Saint, and proves better than any other argument the intense love and veneration had for her by the Church. The Liturgy is a safe criterion for judging the mind of the Church on all objects of devotion.

The great Pope, St. Gregory, who sent the light of Faith, and the principles of civilization, to England, towards the end of the sixth century, has left a work which differs but little from our missals of to-day. It contains Masses for the various festivals throughout the year, as well as Masses of *Requiem* for the dead. In it are found the two Feasts of St. Agnes, with a proper preface, in which we read, amongst other things, the words: "It is indeed becoming and right, just and salutary, for us always, and in every place, to give thanks to Thee, O Holy Lord, Omnipotent Father, Eternal God; and to solemnly celebrate the day consecrated by the Martyrdom of the Blessed Agnes, who, despising the pleasures of worldly riches, and renouncing the desire of human ties, has been admitted to the consortship of the eternal king; and having overcome the weakness of her sex, and suffered a precious death for the Faith of Christ, has been made a partaker of His eternity and His glory."*

* (Lib. Sacr. ad diem, xii, Kal. Feb.)

The Kalendars of all the Churches in the East have the Feast of our Saint ; at Constantinople, beside the two feasts already mentioned, there was a third one, on 5th July. This was in commemoration of the bringing of some of her sacred relics to the Church of St. Lawrence, at Constantinople, during the reign of Theodosius the younger, as narrated by Theodorus Lector.* Assemani, (Tom. vi.) treating of the Kalendars of the whole Church, gives much interesting information concerning the Feasts of Agnes. (See 14th Jan.) From it we can learn how universal was the devotion to her in the Christian world in the early ages of the Church, as expressed by the authoritative voice of the Sacred Liturgy, and how great the glory that encircled her name.

That devotion did not die out, or grow cold. It took root wherever the Catholic Faith was received, for the fame of such a heroine partakes of the universality and immortality of the Church. Hence we find the Venerable Bede enrolling her name in the list of feasts

* (Lib. 2 sub finem.)

for England; and later on, this same feast was a holiday of obligation for women in the days when England's Faith was identical with that of Rome. But the glad festival of the noble maiden ceased to be celebrated when the nation fell away from the light of truth, and obedience to the Supreme earthly Head of the Church. Enough, however, of ancient tradition survived the wreck of three hundred years to inspire Tennyson's hymn, "The Eve of St. Agnes." The aroma of her sanctity still lingers in quiet valleys where she was once the model and sweet patroness of English maidens.

We have spoken of her two feasts; why are there two? Beyond doubt, that on 21st Jan. is in commemoration of her martyrdom. There is no question on this point. But why the unusual honour of a second one? The answer to this is an additional proof of the great estimation in which she was held as a model of purity and perfect immolation to God. It is, we maintain, in honour of her birth. Many authorities contend that it is

not; but seemingly for no better reason than the following:—The Church, they say, does not celebrate the nativity of any Saint, except that of the Blessed Virgin and of St. John the Baptist; hence this second feast is not the nativity of Agnes. This reasoning limps; it assumes what is to be proved. We claim that this is an exception to the rule; and we can prove it; hence theory must give way to fact. St. Gregory the Great, who must have intimately known all about St. Agnes' life and death, is our authority. He was not separated from her time by more years than we are from the foundation of Quebec. Moreover, during that interval learned and devout men abounded; letters were flourishing; the domestic history of the Church in Rome was carefully garnered up. The barbarian irruptions that devastated Europe, and destroyed its early civilization, had not taken place. St. Gregory was of a noble Roman family that had been Christian for generations, and closely associated with the work of the Church. Hence he must have known all local history and tra-

ditions. Now, in his work already quoted, there is a proper preface for the second feast on 28th January, as well as for that on 21st. In this preface we read: "Truly, indeed, her day should be honoured, who thus from her *earthly generation* went forward that she might attain the consortship of the divinity." And in one of the prayers of the Mass, he says: "Be present with us, O Almighty God, celebrating again (or repeating) the Feast of St. Agnes, whom, *born on the rising of this festival*, Thou didst ennoble with ineffable gifts." This is surely clear enough. Assemani, in the work cited above, claims that the second feast was in honour of her nativity, and says that Mazocchi has proved it. To us it seems that we have established it beyond reasonable contention. This is a crowning glory of our gentle Agnes, to have the day of her earthly, as well as that of her heavenly, birth celebrated in the Church with rejoicing. The sweet innocence of her brave soul, and her unshaken constancy to her spouse, merited this peculiar honour.

We have seen a few of the footprints of St. Agnes down the ages; many more exist, but these must suffice for our purpose. Not in the shifting sands of national by-paths has she left her mark, but on the enduring highway of the Church's glorious career are indelibly stamped the footprints of St. Agnes—Virgin, Martyr.

CHAPTER IX.

DEVOTION TO ST. AGNES.

From the foregoing pages we can learn the holy innocence of life, the deep and tender love of God, and the generous courage under cruel trials, of St. Agnes. We have seen her a young girl, in the first bloom of youth, with wealth and position in society, with all worldly advantages, and surrounded by the seductions of a corrupt, though brilliant, pagan refinement, leading a life of Christian perfection, unsullied by the impure atmosphere of Rome, and only intent on glorifying her God. She knew how to be gentle without weakness; how to be amiable and yet sweetly modest; how to be tender towards the lowly and weak, and fiercely courageous in the presence of the scorner. Hers was not a hot-house virtue safely blooming in the shelter; it was a vigorous plant flowering in the open; strengthened and nourished by prayer and the Sacraments,

and safeguarded by watchfulness over her senses. She never forgot that she was made for heaven, and that only by her own fault could she lose it. The words of our Saviour—"what shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"—were ever in her ears; the thought of eternal joys ever in her mind; in her heart an enthusiastic love for her God. She felt, too, the responsibility of her position both towards Christians and pagans. The nobility of her station, far from giving her any claim to exemption from the rules of the Church, imposed upon her the obligation of a more faithful observance. To whom much is given of them much is required—a Scriptural truth too often, alas! relegated to theory, and not honoured in practice in our day. To the pagans she owed example, a practical demonstration of the nobility of a life moulded on the principles of the Catholic Church. She gave that example by her charming manner of life; she confirmed it by her glorious death.

Our lives are being passed in a different age,



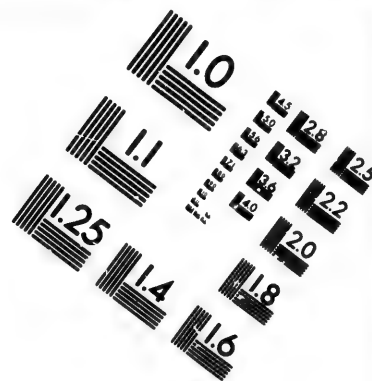
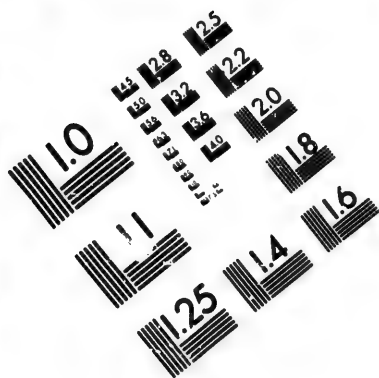
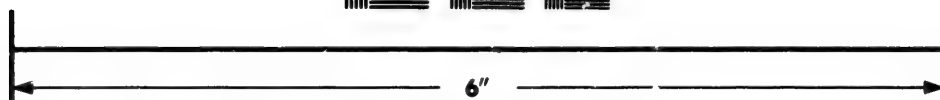
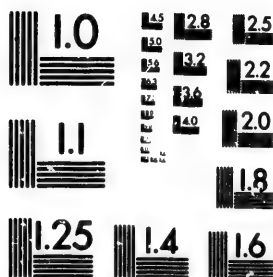


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and in a dissimilar state of society. Yet the great truths of Christianity are the same; heaven can only be gained now, as then, by faith and grace. Now, as then, it will avail a man nothing to gain the entire world and lose his soul. Purity of mind and body, generous love of our God, and vigilance over our senses are still essential. The rack and dungeon, the burning coals, or roaring beasts of the amphitheatre, are not threatened to make us abjure our faith, or fail in morals. No; but a more subtle foe, or rather many foes, far more dangerous, are at work. Disbelief in the fundamental teachings of Christianity openly preached, and those who preach them praised as "eminent divines," "men of broad views," "Christian workers!" Newspapers of the English-speaking world exhaust the language of hyperbole, in a manner that would be ludicrous were it not sad, in extolling as Christian teachers those whose knowledge of Christianity appears to be scarcely less limited than that of the persecutors of Agnes. And similar writings have been propagated for years,

Then we have the worship of material goods, the follies and vanities of those who have money but no guiding principles, and the insane desire on the part of many who have not money, to imitate or surpass these frivolities. In a word, all the worst vices of pagan times survive, toned down, and rendered more dangerously seductive by a thin veneer of outward polish. We are not called upon to die for Christ, but something more difficult, perhaps, is required of us—to live for him—to bear witness to our faith in the midst of a polished, good natured, bantering world, superficial in knowledge, effeminate in practice, and amazingly pretentious. The martyr's palm is not placed within our reach; but the martyr's glory may still be won. Moral courage, however, is necessary. Many who would face the lions in the Coliseum rather than deny God, lack moral courage to manfully uphold their faith in the presence of a fashionable assembly. They prefer to be cowardly disloyal to God, to incurring the jeers or scornful smile of a dissipated reprobate. Many who would dare the

rack rather than offer incense on the altar of Venus, pay ready court at her shrine in order not to be out of touch with "nice" people. Dear St. Agnes, could you return to earth for a time, how your tender heart would ache at the sight of so many of the inheritors of your faith false to your noble principles of action. Not because they are really bad at heart, but because they are too indolent to aspire to lofty purposes, and too cowardly to run counter to the disbelief of the age. You, sweet Agnes, knew how to be a model daughter, and friend, and acquaintance, as well as a winning embodiment of Christian perfection. Many maidens have your faith, but your ardent, unselfish love has no place in their hearts. Hence they please the world, because they are occupied with it; in the sight of God, however, they give no pleasure. What a valuable lesson your life on earth now would be.

We cannot recall you to earth; but we have your memory to revere, your spotless life to admire, your victorious death to encourage us, and your example to serve as our model. We

can, also, have the assistance of your prayers. Immersed now in the unending beatitude of heaven, your pure spirit is still linked to us frail mortals by the sweet bond of Communion of Saints. Enjoying face to face the vision of the Eternal, in whom "we live, and move, and have our being," you can see in Him, as in a clear mirror, the militant Church and its members; in Him, in whom is all cause and reason of being, you can see those who supplicate your aid, and their words are known to you by the intuition of cause, not through material effect. This thought is consoling, and gives at the same time a grand idea of our nearness to the invisible world.

Devotion to St. Agnes, as we have seen, sprung up wherever the Catholic faith was preached. Shall it not take root and produce fruit in the Western world? We want her graceful characteristics, her moral courage, her perfect confidence in God, her firm gentleness, her spirit of sacrifice. Shall we not take her for our ideal? Her heroic ingenuousness appeals to the chivalry of men; her beautiful

soul-loveliness claims the admiration of women. In her we have a model of Christian perfection in a restless and corrupt world. Courage, generosity, endurance, purity, constancy, love unconquerable, all that mankind most prize and revere, are seen to meet and combine in her winning personality. Her titles are not empty ones; she purchased and consecrated them by her martyrdom.

The form of devotion most pleasing to St. Agnes will be to strive to imitate her virtues; for in doing that we will be giving glory to God. She wishes us to be courageous in professing our faith; pure in our lives; diligent in fulfilling our various duties of life; seeking in all things the kingdom of heaven. If we ask her with proper dispositions she, the double-crowned bride of the Lamb, will pray for us before God, and obtain for us grace to enable us to walk in her footsteps. Let none be discouraged; she knows the snares and treacherous paths of a life in the world. She is full of gentle pity for the erring, and of sweet tenderness for the weak. To none who

invoke her will she turn a deaf ear; to all who desire to rise above the dust of the world, and to serve God with a clean heart, she will be a loving help and a faithful patroness. Not without cause was devotion to her so general: she justified it by the number of graces obtained for her clients. Let us, who cannot visit at will her shrine in Rome, build her a sanctuary here, which may be a reminder of her example, a memorial of her glory, and a spot wherein the pure may implore protection, and the sinner obtain the grace of repentance.

HYMN TO ST. AGNES.

O! Virgin Martyr! in whose breast
Such ardent love for Jesus burned,
That neither friends, nor wealth thou mourned,
But, panting for eternal rest,
Thy soul stood true against the test
By which the tyrant sought to shake
The firmness of thy youthful heart;
But vain the trial: for Jesus' sake
Thou spurned the tempter and his art.

Implore for me a constant love
For God, and Mary, Queen of Saints;
That spurning all which folly paints,
My soul, like pure and spotless dove,
May soar all sinful thoughts above;
Nor by the wiles of Satan caught
N'er let it fall to sin, or shame;
But grant that I by Jesus bought
May ever praise His holy name.

THE PRAYER OF ST. AGNES.

The following is the prayer of our Saint when in the midst of the flames. Her devout clients should recite it to be preserved from sin :

“ Almighty, adorable, worshipful, Father of my Lord Jesus Christ, I bless Thee because, through the power of Thy Son, I have escaped the evils threatened by the impious, and with an unpolluted heel have trampled on the filth of the flesh. Behold now I am suffused with the heavenly dew of the Holy Spirit ; the fire dies out around me, the flame is scattered, and the heat of this burning is turned against those who are feeding it. I bless Thee, O ! adorable Father, who dost permit me to come intrepidly to Thee even in the midst of flames. Behold, what I have believed I now see ; what I have desired I now embrace. I confess Thee with my lips and my heart ; I long for Thee

with my whole being. Behold, I come to Thee, the living and true God, who, with our Lord Jesus Christ, Thy Son, and with the Holy Ghost, dost live and reign for ever and ever. - *Amen.*"

(Say Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory, &c.)

Pray for us, O blessed Agnes :

That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.

Let us pray.

O! Almighty and Eternal God, who dost choose the weak things of the world to confound the strong, mercifully grant that we, who venerate thy blessed martyr, Agnes, may experience the benefit of her protection, through Christ our Lord. *Amen.*



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